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RAVENSCROFT, TENNESSEE  
FSA Special Area Rehabilitation Program

"Relief With a Future is Story of FSA Aid Program  
for 66 'Stranded' Farm Families at Ravenscroft."

(News article that appeared in The Nashville Tennessean,  
Sunday, December 29, 1940, and is reprinted with the  
permission of that newspaper.)

CLOSING OF COAL MINES LEFT GROUP TO WREST LIVING FROM SOIL

Three years ago, Beecher England had one cow, some old apple trees he was ready to cut down, a dozen cans of vegetables, and 32 acres of mountain-top farmland.

"With one three-legged mule, I was trying to make a living for my wife and me and 11 children," said Mr. England.

"Today, we have a team of good mares, 14 head of cattle, a pure-bred bull, three registered Poland China pigs, one brood sow and four pigs, 80 Barred Rock hens, an orchard that made 80 bushels of apples, and 1,400 quarts of canned vegetables. I'm on my feet and we have plenty to eat."

Tells New Story

In a few words, England tells the new story of Ravenscroft, the story of the struggle of 66 families to wrest a living from the non-too-farmable soil of the Cumberland Mountain tops.

The people of the Ravenscroft community, in Warren and Cumberland Counties, once had employment in coal mines and timber. Four years ago, the mines closed. More than 300 families were left stranded. Most of them gradually moved out, but about 65 families stayed to try to make a living farming. Some had never farmed before.

For a year they struggled--then came relief help. All agencies, Federal, State, and county, helped. The help was real, but it did not include hope.

'On My Feet, Now'

"I used to get the blues," said Joe Abston. "Now, things are different. I'm getting on my feet. All I want is to make a place for that boy."

He pointed to a blond youngster of 10, one of the 200-odd children of the community, children whose parents and grandparents were natives of the Cumberland Mountain section of Tennessee.

"I want my boy to farm. I don't want him to go on public work. I want to make a place for him. And, by golly, I am getting to a place

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
DO hereby certify that  
[Name] is a citizen of the United States

and that he is entitled to the rights and  
privileges of citizenship.

Witness my hand and the seal of the  
Department of the Interior at Washington, D.C.

this [Date] day of [Month], 19[Year].

Special Agent in Charge, Bureau of Land Management.

By [Signature]  
[Name]  
Special Agent in Charge, Bureau of Land Management.

Attest:  
[Signature]  
[Name]  
Assistant Secretary, Department of the Interior.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and the seal of the Department of the Interior at Washington, D.C., this [Date] day of [Month], 19[Year].

Special Agent in Charge, Bureau of Land Management.

By [Signature]  
[Name]  
Special Agent in Charge, Bureau of Land Management.

Attest:  
[Signature]  
[Name]  
Assistant Secretary, Department of the Interior.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and the seal of the Department of the Interior at Washington, D.C., this [Date] day of [Month], 19[Year].

Special Agent in Charge, Bureau of Land Management.



where I have some hopes of doing something for him."

There are eight in the Abston family. The youngest is 16 months old and is named "T. L." after T. L. Cunningham, the supervisor in charge of the Farm Security Administration's special Ravenscroft project. Cunningham, formerly farm manager for Pleasant Hill Academy, supervises the farm operations for the 66 families, all of whom are on the Farm Security program.

#### Loans On Plans

FSA loans are made on the basis of carefully laid plans for operation of the farm and home--plans which call for live-at-home farming and conservation. FSA loans go for tools, seed, feed, fertilizer, livestock, and farm building improvements, including sanitation. Live-at-home farming means gardens, canning of vegetables and fruits, storage of dried foods, producing and curing meats for home use, home produced milk, and home produced subsistence for the stock. To help the Ravenscroft women with their part in carrying out this program, FSA has Miss Ruth Allison as home management supervisor.

The FSA program is relief with a future. England has borrowed \$585 with his word and good intentions as the principal security. He has repaid \$465 of this amount. By the use made of his FSA loans, England has increased his net worth from \$2,029 to \$3,152, besides increases in livestock and tools. Mr. and Mrs. England have spread 10 tons of lime, screened his house, sealed his well, built a storage cellar, built a 300-chick brooder, built a laying house for 100 hens, built a corn crib, built a new chimney and new front porch for his house, and restored a long-neglected orchard.

England has owned his 32 acres for 20 years, but many of the families on the Ravenscroft property own no land.

#### Leasing Cooperative

Abston is a member of leasing cooperative formed by the families on the Farm Security Administration program. The cooperative has leased the land from Tennessee Products Corporation, which formerly operated the mines, and members of the association pay rent to the cooperative. Part of the rent is paid in labor. The cooperative now has only a one-year lease, but FSA hopes to get a 10-year lease.

FSA measures the progress of the families in part by net worth, which is the total value of all they own, minus all debts. In 1937, the Abstons had a net worth of \$187. This year, it is \$652. Three years ago, they owned one 18-year-old mule, three plows, 20 bushels of corn and 100 bundles of fodder.

Today, after screening their house, building a corn crib and storage pantry, they have a cow and calf, a brood mare, two sows and two pigs.





They have stored three tons of hay, 400 binds of fodder, and 50 bushels of corn. In the pantry are 900 quarts of canned vegetables, three bushels of dried foods, and 66 bushels of potatoes.

Lloyd Black was 19 when his father was killed in the mine—just two months before the shutdown. Lloyd had never farmed, but he set to work to help his mother, two younger brothers, and a younger sister. The Blacks get their house rent free, plus a small compensation. Three of the children are in school.

#### Little On Hand

A year ago, they had on hand 100 quarts of foodstuffs, two bushels of potatoes, 200 pounds of meat, a bushel of turnips, some \$25 worth of bills, and a prize cow, which had been given to Vernon Black, one of the boys, by Supervisor Cunningham as a reward for Vernon's leading his class in school.

Today, after Lloyd had sold \$53 worth of Irish potatoes—250 bushels off one acre that scoffers said wouldn't produce 60—and \$60 worth of beans, the Blacks have a brood mare, a milk cow, the prize sow and four pigs, plus 100 bushels of corn and two tons of hay for the stock. For themselves, they have 508 quarts of canned vegetables, 85 quarts of canned meats, and 160 bushels of potatoes.

Last year, 36 of the FSA families at Ravenscroft who kept complete record books showed an average total income of \$66 from the farm. In 1940, the number of families with complete record books jumped to 54 and the total income from the farms averaged \$212.

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U. S. Department of Agriculture  
Farm Security Administration  
February 11, 1961